

Message Text

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PAGE 01 EC BRU 09621 242133Z

15

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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: STATUS OF DIRECT ELECTIONS

REF: EC BRUSSELS A317

1. SUMMARY: AN AD HOC COMMITTEE OF THE EC'S COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES HAS COMPLETED ITS EXAMINATION OF A DRAFT CONVENTION PROVIDING FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE AD HOC COMMITTEE HAS PREPARED AN OPTIONS PAPER WHICH, IF PASSED BY THE PERM REPS AS EXPECTED ON OCTOBER 30, WILL BE EXAMINED BY THE EC FOREIGN MINISTERS IN NOVEMBER. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS WILL THEN SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (EC HEADS OF GOVERNMENT) ON DECEMBER 1-2. END SUMMARY.

2. THIS REPORT IS PROVIDED IN PART AS BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE VISIT OF THE DELEGATION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO WILL BE IN WASHINGTON FROM OCTOBER 29 - NOVEMBER 1. FOR MEETINGS WITH US CONGRESSMAN AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. THE MISSION WOULD APPRECIATE THE DEPARTMENT'S MAKING THIS TELEGRAM AVAILABLE TO CLIFF HACKETT OF THE HOUSE INTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE AS BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL HOSTS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 EC BRU 09621 242133Z

3. AN AD HOC WORKING PARTY ESTABLISHED BY THE EC COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES HAS NOW COMPLETED ITS STUDY OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN THE PATIJN REPORT ON DIRECT ELECTIONS, NAMED AFTER ITS DRAFTER, A DUTCH PARLIAMENTARIAN, WHICH WAS ADOPTED BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN JANUARY, 1975 (REFAIR). THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES ARE NOW EXAMING THE WORKING PARTY'S PAPER AND AFTER SOME REVISIONS ARE EXPECTED TO GIVE THEIR APPROVAL ON OCTOBER 30. THE CURRENT SCENARIO CALLS FOR THE PAPER TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE EC FOREIGN MINISTERS COUNCIL IN NOVEMBER. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS WILL THEN PUT THEIR VIEWS ON THE QUESTION OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL WHICH WILL MEET IN ROME ON DECEMBER 1-2.

4. THE PERMREPS DO NOT INTEND TO MAKE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS TO MINISTERS BUT ARE RATHER PREPARING AN OPTIONS PAPER IDENTIFYING THE THORNIEST PROBLEMS AND OUTLINING THE PROS AND CONS OF THE DIFFERENT WAYS THEY COULD BE HANDLED. THE PAPER ADDRESSES ITSELF TO THE FOLLOWING MAJOR ISSUES: ELECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF COMMON NATIONAL PROCEDURES. THE TREATY OF ROME STATES THAT THE PROCEDURES FOR DIRECT ELECTION FOR PARLIAMENT SHOULD BE UNIFORM (FOR EXAMPLE, EITHER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, SINGLE MEMBER DISTRICTS, OR MIXED). THE PATIJN REPORT ON THE OTHER HAND, LARGELY IN AN EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT THE FIRST ELECTION WILL BE HELD NO LATER THAN THE FIRST SUNDAY OF MAY, 1978 RECOMMENDS NATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR THAT ELECTION. BY 1980 ACCORDING TO PATIJN'S PROPOSAL, THE PARLIAMENT WOULD PROPOSE TO THE COUNCIL, FOR ADOPTION BY THE MEMBER STATES, A UNIFORM SYSTEM OF ELECTIONS WHICH WOULD BE INSTITUTED IN TIME FOR THE 1983 BALLOTING.

-- A SINGLE ELECTION DATE OR STAGGERED ELECTIONS TO COINCIDE WITH NATIONAL BALLOTING. ONE OF THE PROBLEMS OF MOVING TO A SINGLE ELECTION IS THAT SUCH A PROCEDURE WOULD ADD TO THE ALREADY EXPENSIVE BILL WHICH MEMBER STATES WOULD HAVE TO PAY IF THE PATIJN REPORT WERE ADOPTED (SEE BELOW FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS OF THIS POINT). THE "EUROPEAN" VIEWPOINT, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THAT THE ELECTION SHOULD BE HELD ON A SINGLE DATE, FOR ACHIEVING MAXIMUM IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION.

-- DUAL MANDATE. THE PATIJN REPORT WOULD PERMIT A DEPUTY OF UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 EC BRU 09621 242133Z

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO SIMULTANEOUSLY HOLD A SEAT IN HIS NATIONAL LEGISLATURE. IF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS ARE HELD SIMULTANEOUSLY (AND THUS ON DIFFERENT DATES FROM NATIONAL ELECTIONS), IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR CANDIDATES FROM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT PARTIES TO BE DEFEATED IN ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WHEN THEY ARE IN MID-TERM IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS. SOME OBSERVERS FEAR THAT THIS POTENTIAL INTERPLAY OF NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN-WIDE ELECTIONS COULD UNDULY EMBARRASS THE PARTY

IN POWER AND COULD EVEN IN SOME CASES RISK CASTING DOUBTS ON THE STRENGTH OF ITS MANDATE.

-- THE PATIJN REPORT CALLS FOR AN INCREASE IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FROM 195 TO 355 MEMBERS. THIS RAISES THE QUESTION OF HOW THE NEW SEATS WILL BE APPORTIONED. MOREOVER, SOME MEMBER STATES ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ADDITIONAL COST INVOLVED IN INCREASING THE NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE COMMENSURATE INCREASE IN SUPPORT STAFF AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS.

-- CONSULTATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT. ANOTHER UNRESOLVED QUESTION IS WHETHER PARLIAMENT ITSELF SHOULD BE CONSULTED ON THE ABOVE ISSUES. WE UNDERSTAND IT WAS INITIALLY THOUGHT THAT PARLIAMENT WOULD NOT BE INVOLVED UNTIL AFTER THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL. HOWEVER, PARLIAMENT OFFICIALS ARE NOW LOBBYING VIGOROUSLY FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTERS COUNCIL IN NOVEMBER.

5. IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS, THERE IS THE PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT ISSUE OF EXPANDING THE POWERS OF PARLIAMENT. AT PRESENT THESE ARE RELATIVELY LIMITED. PARLIAMENT HAS THE RIGHT INTER ALIA, TO BE CONSULTED ON A VARIETY OF MATTERS BY THE COMMISSION, A ROLE, ALONG WITH THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMISSION, IN DETERMINING THE EC BUDGET AND THE RIGHT TO DISSOLVE THE COMMISSION (BUT NOT THE RIGHT TO REMOVE ANY ONE COMMISSIONER NOR TO HAVE A ROLE IN THE DESIGNATION OF SUCCESSORS). THERE IS SOME FEELING THAT UNLESS PARLIAMENT'S AUTHORITY IS INCREASED THE HOLDING OF DIRECT ELECTIONS WILL PROVE TO BE A FUTILE AND EXPENSIVE EXERCISE WHICH WILL HAVE LITTLE IMPACT IN ACHIEVING A MORE DEMOCRATIC EUROPE. ON THE OTHER HAND, MOST OBSERVERS DOUBT THAT ANY NEW GRANT OF SIGNIFICANT POWERS TO THE PARLIAMENT IS IN THE CARDS FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 EC BRU 09621 242133Z

6. COMMENT: OPINION IS DIVIDED AS TO WHETHER THE TARGET DATE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS BY 1978 WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED BOTH BY THE EC HEADS OF GOVERNMENT AND BY PARLIAMENT IS REALISTIC. EVEN IF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL IN DECEMBER APPROVES AN OUTLINE FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS BY 1978 (AND THE UK AND DENMARK CONTINUE TO RESERVE THEIR POSITION ON THIS POINT) THEIR WILL BE A NUMBER OF PROCEDURAL POINTS TO BE COMPLETED. WITH A FAVORABLE COUNCIL DECISION IN DECEMBER, HOWEVER, THE DEADLINE WILL BE DIFFICULT BUT BY NO MEANS IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DECEMBER COUNCIL POSTPONES THE DECISION, IT IS ALMOST A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT THE 1978 DEADLINE WOULD HAVE TO SLIP. END COMMENT.

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